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Interviewee: Sister Cecile Therese Beresford

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Laura Townsend, Production Coordinator, CSJ Institute.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:25.23] INTERVIEWER: Would you start us off by sharing your full name and your age?

[00:00:30.04] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I'm Sister Cecile Therese Beresford. I haven't gone by that name for a very long time. Most of the people call me "Ceese"--I prefer it--it's more friendly. And I've tried to convince people that "Sister" is a professional title--it's not a name. [laughs]. And so some people appreciate and understand that, and others don't. So you get used to "Sister". But "Ceese" is really what I prefer. I'm ninety years old. My birthday is in January.

[00:01:11.05] INTERVIEWER: Sister Ceese--or Ceese--[laughs]--where were you born, and could you tell us a little about your family?

[00:01:20.17] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I was born in Hastings, Nebraska. And by the time I was ready for the eighth grade I had lived in Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri--because my mother was raising two children as a single mom--along with a very supportive family. And so I lived with many members of my family over those early years, until in the eighth grade we went--my sister and I went to a boarding school in Evansville, Wisconsin. And it was there that I finished elementary school and started my high school years at Evansville Public High School. I was there a year when my mother decided that she was substantially--or financially--what do I want to say--financially stable enough that Diane and I could come and be with her. So we went with her in Dubuque, Iowa, where I started high school. And because I was noted for having a lovely singing voice, my mother wanted me to have singing lessons. So she took me to the Visitation Academy, to the Visitation Sisters, who--Sister Patricia [??] was noted for being a very good vocal teacher. So I was there for a year. And then my mom decided since the rest of her family had moved to California, it was time for us to join them. So we moved to California in '41, going across the upper United States on a troop train from Dubuque, Iowa to Fresno. So there were mostly soldiers on that plane, and they were darling with Diane and me. So we had a good time across the country. And before we left Dubuque, my mom asked the Sisters at Visitation, "What would be a good school for me to get the two girls into when we get to Fresno?" So they looked up in this big book that looked like a dictionary to me--which was the Kennedy directory, of course--and suggested St. Theresa's in Fresno. So that was my first connection with Sisters of St. Joseph.

[00:04:42.19] INTERVIEWER: What was it like--what impact do you think it had on you to grow up with a single mother and so much travel and uprooting from time to time?

[00:04:55.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: [laughs]. My mom often said to me when I got a little older, "[Joanne]"--that was my baptismal name--"we grew up together." And I think that there's a certain amount of truth in that. I never felt that I wasn't trusted or loved. She wasn't a terribly demonstrative woman, but I knew I was loved and trusted--there was no doubt. And the aunts that I had the opportunity to be with were very much the same. So later on, when all of the talk in the media started with "single-parent families", I really didn't know what they were talking about--because I had had none of the dreadful experiences some of them did.

[00:05:53.00] INTERVIEWER: Were you a very religious family?

[00:05:56.13] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: No. [laughs]. We were "unchurched". [laughs]. We had a grandfather who taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana--vocal--and he would come and spend

summers with us. And the first couple weeks we would go from one church to another to find the choir that he liked best. And we would go to that church in the summer. When he left we didn't go any more. So no, I was unchurched, and I knew nothing about God, or saints, or Mass, or liturgy, or priests, or nuns--none of that--until I went to the Visitation Academy, and then to St. Theresa's.

[00:06:53.10] INTERVIEWER: So what started to attract you to the Catholic tradition?

[00:06:58.03] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I fell in love with Sister Laurentia [Sr. Mary Laurentia Digges?? (1910-1991)]. [laughs]. Sister Laurentia was on the faculty at St. Theresa's in Fresno. She taught English. And in a certain sense she became my mentor and best friend. And I wasn't even a Catholic. And toward the end of my junior year I told her that I would like to be a Sister. And she said, "Well, Joanne, you need to be a Catholic first." So I took instructions, became a Catholic, and then said, "Now I'm ready." And they said, "No, you have to be a Catholic for at least a year before you can enter." So that meant that I went to the Mount after I graduated--for a year before I entered.

[00:07:59.26] INTERVIEWER: What was it about Sister Laurentia?

[00:08:03.18] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: She was never surprised at anything. You could tell her anything. And she had a sense of humor. She was a fabulous teacher. In fact she was a Mount faculty member too--wrote a couple of books that are probably in the library up there. She really became a friend of our family. So--however, when I told my mother I wanted to enter, she went to the Superior to ask her if she thought I knew what I was doing. The response was, "Yes, I think she does." So I had no problem getting ready to enter.

[00:08:57.27] INTERVIEWER: What did you hope to accomplish--or what did you have in mind for your life when you entered?

[00:09:05.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I didn't have anything in mind, other than that I wanted to be a Sister. I wanted to be like Laurentia, that's what I wanted. [laughs]. And a funny story about that is, I sort of thought she was mine. [laughs]. And when I got acquainted with some of the other Sisters in the community and heard them talking about her as I did, it seemed like they were trespassing on personal territory. It was sort of a, you know, "How could that be?". She was a very fine first friend in the community.

[00:09:57.23] INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about your early days in the novitiate or as a postulant? Was it surprising or hard to adjust, or?

[00:10:10.01] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I couldn't figure out what they were all doing, because very little of what they were doing was familiar to me. I think I was unconscious through most of my postulate and novitiate. [laughs]. I don't have all the many memories of that period of time that many of those I entered with have. I think I need to skip over that period to my ministry segments where I have more--that was a blur and I was glad to get out of there. It wasn't that I didn't like it--it was--well as I said, it was a blur. I was going through motions to get at what I really wanted.

[00:11:20.14] INTERVIEWER: And what was it that you really wanted?

[00:11:24.14] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I wanted to do something--to be something, you know. And that just seemed like a lock-step waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting.

[00:11:41.00] INTERVIEWER: So while you were in the novitiate then you continued your education at the Mount?

[00:11:48.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Yes. I did. We all did. And then when we left the novitiate, several of us were chosen to continue study full time to finish our degree, and I was one of those. So I finished my degree at the Mount with a--what--a BA--I forgot whether it was English or--English I think and a minor in History.

[00:12:23.04] INTERVIEWER: Had you always thought you would go to college?

[00:12:27.20] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I never thought about it--but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed UCLA even more, because I again was a full time student--which was unusual in those days. Most people went part time, or during the summer. And I had the privilege really of going full time. And I had some very fine instructors at UCLA--one of whom I kept in touch with for the rest of my life until she died just a few years ago.

[00:13:08.23] INTERVIEWER: What did you study at UCLA?

[00:13:12.12] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I studied Home Economics Education and Administration. And one of those instructors--the one I had for Food Technology--hired me to work for her. She was doing some sort of a research study on--research study on rice. And I had to put this stuff through the centrifuge, and I really enjoyed working for her and with her. And that's one of the things that solidified our friendship that lasted for as long as it did.

[00:14:00.06] INTERVIEWER: So what was your first full time ministry?

[00:14:05.23] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Was at St. Brigid's in Pacific Beach, a suburb of San Diego. And I taught first, second and third grades there for a couple years. And then--now that was a highlight--not the teaching as much as the group that I lived with. [laughs].

[00:14:32.03] INTERVIEWER: Tell us about that.

[00:14:33.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Sister Mary Helen Pettid [(1901-1993)], Sister Rose Cecilia Harrington [(1919-2003)], Sister Bernard Joseph [??] and myself--the four of us. And Mary Helen was a delight, and she treated us like adults. And for the first time since I entered I felt like I was in a situation that I understood. [laughs]. I felt trusted again--like I had good sense. It was a wonderful experience being with her and that community. And Rose Cecilia and I then lived with one another off and on over the years, and so we became very good friends. My next mission was with--I think it was with Cathedral Girls High School in San Diego. And that was less pleasant--not unpleasant, just [shrugs] I can sort of leapfrog over that to St. Mary's Academy, where I taught sophomores World History--[laughs]--and some religion classes, and I've prayed ever since that I didn't teach them heresy. [laughs].

[00:16:13.20] INTERVIEWER: There were probably some future Sisters in those classes.

[00:16:18.01] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Um--I don't think so. They were sophomores--no, I don't think so. But probably other people did teach some future Sisters. I was only there two years, and then that was when I continued my education at UCLA and finished.

[00:16:40.08] INTERVIEWER: And how was that decision made for you to go on for a masters or for higher education?

[00:16:45.19] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: [laughs]. You really want to know? [laughs].

[00:16:49.06] INTERVIEWER: Only what you want to share.

[00:16:51.12] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I was walking down the hall at--I think it was here, because I was living here when I was studying at UCLA. And Mother Josephine [Sister Mary Josephine Feeley (1905-1991)??] who was the provincial at the time met me in the corridor. And she said, "Sister dear, I think we would like you to go on in Home Economics at UCLA." Well I didn't know anything about Home Economics, but the idea of studying more sounded like a really good thing. So that's how I got into higher education. [laughs]. And it's an interesting thing that at--when I finished at UCLA, the chairperson of the Home Economics department, Sister Marguerite Ellard, died during that summer. And so I went immediately to that department and to the chair. [laughs]. But again--again, maybe it was just stupidity, but I seemed to fit. And I seemed to know what to--and I think it was because I had just come from UCLA, and at that time Home Economics was really a major factor in both--especially the "land grant" colleges, and in high schools,

where they would do things like Child Development and Home Management and Family Relationships--things that largely young women could use, because many of them married shortly after they left high school at that point in time. Not so now, but then. So I started developing the curriculum with student teachers in mind. And that didn't go over so well at the Mount at the time, because they did not understand how a professional department--they understood nursing, but they didn't understand how a professional department like that could fit hand-in-glove with the liberal arts. And of course, most of the real gutsy stuff of Home Economics is liberal arts--Nutrition, Sociology--you know, all those things. Anyway, that's a whole other story. So I had a lot of interesting experiences at the Mount working on getting faculty to fit into the areas that I thought we ought to expand in. Did some team teaching with a professor whose name I don't remember in the Sociology department. And that was not thought of--we weren't doing things like that then. And that's some of the stuff I brought from my experience at UCLA.

[00:20:40.07] INTERVIEWER: It sounds like the college level was where you belonged. Would you say--you know, you started in elementary, and then high school, and then college. What was that transition like in terms of the levels you were teaching?

[00:21:00.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I enjoyed the young women at the Mount. You could banter and tease with them, and have a really sensible conversation where I didn't find that, certainly in elementary school, or in the grades I taught. And I didn't really experience it with the high school students either. But the other thing I recognized later on in my life--I wasn't at that level long enough to develop the kind of relationships that many of our Sisters have. So it's me, not the students, you know. But at the Mount it was different. In fact, one course I taught on Management--at that time Home Management Apartments were very important as a part of the curriculum. And students would live in the apartment for a good portion of one semester with a faculty member, living on a budget, planning the meals, doing all those kind of things--plus keeping up with their regular courses. I enjoyed that thoroughly. I did that for about four years with students, both semesters. It was during that period of time that I made one very good friend--Michelle Larkin--with whom I still keep in touch with. We've travelled together--we email--we just became friends. You know sometimes when you're teaching it's hard to bridge the gap between student and friend. And Mike and I have done that for many years. And that was the kind of thing I enjoyed about the college women that I didn't experience earlier.

[00:23:20.01] INTERVIEWER: Having worked with college students myself, I know that sometimes it's a very exciting time in their own development that you get to be a part of.

[00:23:30.05] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: That's true.

[00:23:31.27] INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So what would you--especially at that time in the fifties and sixties, what were you seeing as some of their needs or some of the ways you were supporting them?

[00:23:42.13] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: [laughs]. Well, any number of them were dating seriously, looking--because I was dealing with juniors and seniors. They were looking toward marriage. So a lot of what we were doing fit right in to their planning. And they would bring their boyfriends or fiancés to the apartment, and so I would get to know them too. And that was another wonderful experience. [laughs]. One young woman at supper one evening said, "Well, I'm going stop smoking." And I forgot what the fellas name was she was going with. And she said, "We're going to save our money." And I said, "Well, what are you saving it for?" "For our first bed." [laughs]. It was that kind of thing that you could share with them that was real. And you could move them then to another level or another point of valuing. It was a whole different ball game for me.

[00:25:12.29] INTERVIEWER: You went to--then you went to Fontbonne College?

[00:25:19.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: That's another part of my life.

[00:25:22.13] INTERVIEWER: Not to move off the Mount too quickly, if there are other things about the Mount that you want to share.

[00:25:30.09] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: No. I think the fact that I said I didn't think the Mount

understood the melding of a professional department other than nursing with the liberal arts began to be a thorn in my side. And so at the time we had six colleges. And it was decided that because once a person got assigned at a college you were pretty much there for the rest of your life, that it would be good for us to move around a bit. And so they had a faculty exchange program. And initially you volunteered for that, but of course the volunteering--you couldn't just be sent any place, because the opening had to be one that you fit into, and that they needed. Well fortunately, I volun--well, I volunteered--and fortunately Fontbonne was at a crux where they were wanting to develop their Home Economics department and a couple of rather elderly Sisters were retiring from it, so I fit in very well. So there was another Sister from the St. Louis province and I who were assigned that August to start developing the Home Economics department with an emphasis in Nutrition and Dietetics and Home Economics education. So then I got to supervise student teachers, which was part of my background also. So that period of time for me was very, very, very fruitful. I became very involved professionally--was the President of the Missouri Home Economics Association, and went on to become a part of the American Home Economics Association's board. And as a result, moved around the United States almost annually, because their conventions were very important to keep in touch with. So I don't think there was a major city that I didn't visit over the next eight or ten years. Which was not only valuable for the department, but personally valuable. And we developed the student's professional arm of the Home Economics Association, so they would come with us. We were very active in the Missouri and St. Louis Home Economics Associations. In fact, my companion [Mary Carol] was a dietician who had finished at Fontbonne and then went to St. Paul to do her internship. So she came back with some very current thoughts about that area. So we really worked together well. We're still friends. We've vacationed together, you know--it was great. So that--getting to Fontbonne was another very positive part of my professional life, ministerial life, and of course that was during the Vatican II changes--

[00:29:41.06] INTERVIEWER: Yes, we'll get to that. [laughs].

[00:29:42.18] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Fontbonne is right across the street from Washington University, and so we got in on some of--all of the nastiness that went on over at Washington U. We had--oh, and by the way, I was also Director of Residence, both at the Mount and at Fontbonne. I was Directory of Residence at Fontbonne during the period that Washington University had some--you know they had fires on campus, and--and we began having black students on our campus who got involved with students at Washington University. And I came one afternoon to my office and the phone was ringing. [laughs]. And I answered and there's a group of students who have taken over--I forget the name of that student residence hall--but anyway, one of the residents hall. So I dashed over there. And the place was just wall-to-wall kids--some of ours, and some of Washington University's. So it was stuff like that that I ran into that, if it hadn't been for good resident assistants I would have been in a pickle--because I wouldn't have been able to handle that all by myself.

[00:31:28.00] INTERVIEWER: I'm not sure I'm--what's--what was the issue at the--was this because in the 60's and there was integration that was going on and causing tensions? Can you share with us a little about that?

[00:31:38.23] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: [Nods]. Right. Right.

It was a lot of integration. And we were no more ready for it than the man in the moon. And of course universities weren't either. And being right across the street from one was both valuable and liability. [laughs]. But those were interesting days. And in terms of Vatican II at that time, one of the more progressive churches was called The College Church, which was run by the Jesuits. And a lot of the current really good hymns we sing were written by the St. Louis Jesuits from The College Church. And so we would go to The College Church on Sundays and we would literally be anxious to go next Sunday to see what new songs they would be presenting. So you know, when almost any one of those Jesuit songs that we sing today, I was singing as they wrote them during that period of time. So that was another value that enhanced my appreciation of the changing liturgy and the Jesuits themselves--but also the wonderful group of women I was living with at that time in St. Louis.

[00:33:30.08] INTERVIEWER: So I imagine you were mostly living with St. Louis province Sisters.

[00:33:33.09] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Yes.

[00:33:34.23] INTERVIEWER: What--so how did the--so there were changes in the liturgy but there were a number of changes particularly in religious life. How did you as a community share that and experience that and was that difficult, challenging, hopeful?

[00:33:50.26] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, when I arrived in St. Louis I lived at Fontbonne. They didn't have a real residence, but you were all over the campus. And then a group of us got together at one point and thought, you know there's this mezzanine in the Administration Building that's not used, and there's several bedrooms there. Why don't we ask to develop a small local community there? Well, after a lot of back and forth, we got permission to do that. But we were persona non grata as far as the rest of the faculty were--they didn't appreciate our moving out of the general faculty, you know. But we did that for about a year and a half, maybe two, and then literally moved off campus into a house--[laughs]--not too far from the college. We had a hard time getting that house, because a group of prostitutes had lived in the house before we wanted it. In fact the front door was painted red. And the neighborhood, when they heard that eight Sisters wanted to move into that house, were not very pleased with more women moving in--no not more--women moving into that house. So we had several meetings with the neighborhood association, and finally induced them to give us a chance. [laughs]. So from then on we had a very pleasant relationship with the neighborhood association, but we had to prove ourselves before they let us move in. And there was also something about--and I think there's such a thing in Los Angeles in certain areas too--only a certain number of unrelated adults can live in a given location, and that was part of it. We had to overcome that difficulty too. So there were those things, but we managed. We lived together very well, the eight of us, for a number of years.

[00:36:41.05] INTERVIEWER: Would you say that as a community you embraced some of the changes?

[00:36:45.18] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Definitely. Definitely.

[00:36:47.11] INTERVIEWER: Could you say more about that?

[00:36:49.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well we had all changed the habit for one thing. And I think some place I wrote you something about--or maybe I didn't--maybe I was thinking about it. The thing I appreciated was anonymity. I disliked very much being always recognized with preconceived notions attributed to you, whether they were accurate or not. And to be able to go shopping, whether it was in a grocery store or a department store, and not be pointed at by little children, or--I found that freedom and I never turned back. Never. Never wished for the habit. Never. Wished for some better looking stuff, but--[laughs]--I never wished to go back as some did.

[00:38:01.11] INTERVIEWER: What about things like spiritual practices or government--those kinds of changes?

[00:38:07.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, the groups I lived with were very much in keeping with what Vatican II was trying to develop, so I was very fortunate that way. I lived with people with those same ideas, same values, same desires, same hopes, aspirations. I didn't have a problem with that at the local level. It was at the next level where you would have--you know like when you'd come to an assembly, that's when you'd begin to see we are all in different places--real different places. And we still are, but not to that extent--not to that extent at all.

[00:39:10.24] INTERVIEWER: It seems it's a bit unusual--not unheard of, but unusual--for Sisters to spend a lot of time in another province. How does that--how has that impacted your experience of being a Sister of St. Joseph?

[00:39:26.25] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, I was also very fortunate. I often say to myself, "How come you have been so lucky?" I was very fortunate while I was in St. Louis to be selected for our general government, which at that time was somebody from St. Louis, somebody from each one of the provinces. And I happened to again be fortunate to work with a very far-seeing general superior Sister Mary Kevin Ford and her assistant Sister Ida Robertine Berresheim [birth name Elizabeth Jean]. And then because I had--at that time if you were going to live in another province for a long period of time, you literally had to change provinces. So you had to go through the rigmarole of getting permission to leave one and entering

another. So at that point I was a member of the St. Louis province. And at that time we were--[rubs nose]--my nose is itching.[laughs]. At that time we were experimenting with "discernment" as a method of decision-making--again, a springboard from our relationships with the Jesuits. And so they were doing the same thing out here. Well it happened that my friend Rose Cecilia was selected for the general council at the same time I was. So what would normally have ever happened was she from St. Louis and I from--or she from Los Angeles and I from St. Louis landed on the same general council. That was a period of time during which we were renewing our "Holy Rule"--constitution--so there was a lot going on with regard to that. And there was a movement to establish some sort of research and development arm at the generalate, where we would have a better idea of our own actuarial and statistical background. And at that general chapter it was decided that they would indeed open such an office at the generalate. And so the congregation was open to people indicating they would like to do that. And I--that sounded like something I would really like to do at that point. So I wrote out my materials and sent them to Sister Mary Kevin--had a couple interviews with her--[laughs]--and she kept saying behind her desk and I hear, "Sister, I'm a person that needs results!" [laughs]. And so ultimately I got that job, so I was at the generalate for two years as the--in the Research and Development Office, and then became a member of the general council. So that prepared me well for the next chapter, because Mary Kevin and I had to present all these statistics. And every generalate gets this volume of stuff to answer from the Vatican every year. And so that all helped very much. And it was at a time when you know some people were living alone. And the Vatican wanted to know how many local communities did you have? Well then the big question is, was one person alone--is that a local community? So we talked and talked and talked about that--decided we needed another name for that. And that's when we started using the word "unit". So it didn't matter how many people were there--that was a unit of the congregation. So that's how we got around that Vatican leap.

[00:44:46.20] INTERVIEWER: It seems like it was a time of major ecclesiological shifts that you were a witness to. What did you notice, or what were some of those tensions or excitements?

[00:45:05.13] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well again I think I realized what a wise woman Sister Mary Kevin was, and how right she was for the time we were in, and that when she said I want a product, she meant it. And at that point we were--you know it was a general superior, an assistant and four counselors. And we were really counselors. She used us in that way. We weren't just there representing a province. And of course I don't have anything to compare that with because that was my experience. But I know from hearing--hearsay--that wasn't always the way it had worked. So--and I think across the congregation it was very well thought of that what I just said a few minutes ago--she was the right person at the right time for us--to deal with the Vatican, move Vatican II forward, and try to help us understand--and she would say this so often: "Sisters, you did not enter a province. You entered a congregation." And now you see, in what we're doing right now, in this particular period of time, getting ready for the next congregational chapter, that's exactly what we're working on. And she was way back there thinking the same thing. We need to think congregationally. So I think my experience at the generalate--I need a drink of water.

[00:47:27.27] [Director's comments].

[00:48:52.17] INTERVIEWER: You're talking about being part of the generalate, and--and it sounds like Sister Mary Kevin had this model of governance or of leadership that is very much what congregations around the United States and the LCWR [Leadership Conference of Women Religious] probably practice today.

[00:49:11.22] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I don't know if everybody would agree with that, but certainly it was a forerunner of what we're experiencing now. My experience at the generalate took me to Peru, and Japan, and several times to Hawaii. So again, the picture of the congregation became real for me--it wasn't those people way out there, you know. And I would say the next segment of my life enhanced that even more. When I finished with the stint I had at the generalate, I didn't know what I wanted to do. But I had a couple of friends who had been developing a group of religious women to do facilitation work with leadership groups. And so I interviewed with them and they hired me--[Inter-community] Consultants. And there were eight or nine of us from different religious communities. And we were interested in systemic change. And we wanted to exhibit and exemplify what we were teaching by what we did ourselves. So we used the systems theory, developed curriculum around that, which of course included communications, and

boundaries, and vocabularies--just all kinds of stuff that was really important at that time--to help small groups, and especially leadership groups, to work together, but then to work with their membership. We decided to--we would be better off if we incorporated separately. So we incorporated in the State of Missouri because it was less expensive than California. And we did every--we had no hired staff--we did everything ourselves. And we for all practical purposes, and most often, we went in twos, because we figured that what I might see the other person would see better--or if I didn't see this that person would see it--or hear. And that was our modus operandi. We worked largely with women, but we did work with many men's communities. And they were the dickens to work with--because they knew it all. [smiles]. They were hard to work with. [laughs]. It's not just because you're sitting there [points at Kelby Thwaits].

[00:53:18.25] KELBY THWAITS: What's that?

[00:53:20.19] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: That men are hard to work with. [all laugh].

[00:53:22.18] KELBY THWAITS: I'm just laughing because I agree with you.

[00:53:26.13] INTERVIEWER: Well, and when you--I'm hearing this as men religious as communities.

[00:53:30.29] INTERVIEWER: Men religious communities. [Nods]. Yep.

[00:53:34.26] KELBY THWAITS: Do you feel comfortable elaborating at all--?

[00:53:38.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I was trying to think what I could elaborate on that--

[00:53:41.01] KELBY THWAITS: Yeah, take a minute.

[00:53:43.18] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, this is not the most important thing, but one thing: they wouldn't do their homework. And sometimes--well, most of them drank. And that didn't help matters. And one situation that Rose and I--not Rose Cecilia, another Rose--and I ran into--and I won't mention the name of the community--everything was a sexual double entendre. And it was very, very uncomfortable. And finally one afternoon it got so personal that I said, "We're leaving right now." And Rose and I got up and left. And we went and visited a psychologist--no a psychiatrist--at St. Louis University, to try to determine to what extent we could continue working with this, or whether we were reading into it more than we should. And he said, "No, that was very much out of place." It was a--it was those kind of things--not doing their homework, or laughing at some assignment we made. Now they didn't all do this, but it was a general enough pattern that I finally said at one of our staff meetings that I wasn't willing to work with the gentlemen anymore. And I didn't. Maybe I just never had enough men in my life, I don't know--but I don't think that what we experienced was [gestures air quotes] routine or normal or anything like that.

[00:56:16.28] INTERVIEWER: Do you think there was some clericalism involved?

[00:56:19.13] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Definitely. Definitely. And the awful part of this is, that those were the men that their membership chose for leadership roles. Anyway.

[00:56:47.18] INTERVIEWER: You had an experience of religious life at it seems to me a number of levels--and by that I mean the local level, provincial, congregational, and then even beyond to inter-congregational or inter-community. And that must be a different kind of experience of religious life than many of your other Sisters did.

[00:57:09.04] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Yes. [laughs]. That's why living here in this location [Carondelet Center] is a challenge. It's a retirement center, and I know that and realize it, accept it, appreciate it, want it, know we need it. But there are so many levels of capability or lack of capability that you don't always know if the person I meet here this morning is going to be the same one I meet this afternoon in another--. So conversation is not easy. And I also realize--and I have to keep telling myself this too--everybody isn't as interested in some of the nitty gritty about congregation and beyond that I am, because of my experience. That makes a whole big difference. And I'm not saying that to denigrate anyone. It's just we've all had different experiences. But I remember once a friend of mine came back from Peru, and

in chatting with her I said, "What's one of the hardest things for you in coming back?" And she said, "People don't ask you any questions." And I've been very conscious of that ever since. When people come in from other provinces or other areas, to try to enter into conversation and ask them questions so you find out what they're doing. And that's true--we don't do that with one another very well or very easily. And we all have stories that go beyond how long you waited at the doctor's office and what medicines you're taking. And I know that those are important, but I don't know--anyway.

[01:00:03.03] INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Can we talk a little bit about the charism, and--it sounds like you might have been around during when the Federation was started, or some of the research that started into the history and the roots. Did that start to shape you, or inspire you?

[01:00:24.26] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: No I wasn't part of that at all, but yes it did inspire me.

[01:00:29.19] INTERVIEWER: Is there a part of the history or charism that really speaks to you?

[01:00:36.18] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I think the part that really speaks to me is the "dear neighbor" and the justice issues. And I say that from this perspective: I have never been in a situation--I've never--I've only had a couple of experiences in parishes. I've never been in situations where I would have been involved in justice issues as many of our Sisters have been. So mine has more been from out here looking--supporting, encouraging, being present to, but it's not been part of my experience. I think that more recently the thing that has really impacted me is from our last congregational chapter, and the Calls to Action. The very way it's set up--"We believe, therefore we commit"--that has really touched me deeply. And it's not just a bunch of words any more--it's real. And I don't find that always with some of our women. They can speak about the charism, and beautifully--but the Calls to Action they can't even find the booklet. Those are the kinds of things that I find hard.

[01:03:07.18] INTERVIEWER: Is there one of the Calls to Action that you think about a lot, or?

[01:03:13.17] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: The one that I worked on with the committee--and that's the one "seeing with new eyes". And a video from the National Geographic really impacted me. And it was a gentleman who was photographing. And he kept talking about--you have to change the lens [makes rotating motion]. And oh my, did that ever touch me. Because I thought, "That's exactly what I have to do. I can't keep looking at things the way I have always looked at them. I have to move that lens." And I can remember my mom--what my mom--my mom was a photographer. And we would sit for half hours at a time waiting for something to happen so she could take that picture. And I thought in my impatience--. No, the "seeing with new eyes" has really helped me a lot.

[01:04:29.29] INTERVIEWER: What do you see with new eyes?

[01:04:34.26] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: This is going to be very mundane. I have changed the manner in which I have brushed my teeth. [laughs]. We were encouraged by that group on creation to use as little water as we really needed. And rather than leave the water running all the time--I put toothpaste on--turn the water off--brush--turn the water on--keep turning it off and on. I've been doing that now for about two years. It took me a long time to get into the habit. But I think that's what I think I mean by changing the lens [makes rotating motion]. Not that that little bit of water is going to make that much difference, but that does impact the way I look at other things too. So for another example--water at the table. Put as much water in the glass as you think you're going to drink. Or if you take a whole glass, then sit there until you finish drinking the whole--that's--now as I say, those are very mundane. But they do help me look at the differences between wanting and needing. And what's the lens I look through if I want something and what's the lens I look through if I really need this.

[01:06:32.18] INTERVIEWER: To me that seems to have a lot to do with the "dear neighbor".

[01:06:38.03] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Absolutely.

[01:06:39.17] INTERVIEWER: How would you make that connection?

[01:06:43.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, I'm surrounded by the dear neighbor. I don't know if that water example will translate, but when I first came here--I came here August 1st, 2012. So I've been here a little over four years. And initially, I was very, very impatient at meal time with the conversation. And as I got to know some of the Sisters in terms of their disabilities, I was able to shift that lens [makes rotating motion] to what are they capable of doing with that disability. And then I began to realize sometimes I came to the table too tired to talk. So the dear neighbor impacted me here from a very personal level, where sometimes in other situations I didn't have that insight yet. And I'm not saying I'm doing it beautifully, but I'm working on it. [laughs].

[01:08:13.28] INTERVIEWER: I think you mentioned something about retreats and prayer. Would you share a little bit about your spiritual life, your--what that's meant for you?

[01:08:27.00] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, for a long time--and I've talked about this with my spiritual director--and have thought and reflected on it--for all practical purposes I did not know a father. And I had a devil of a time thinking of God as "Father". I didn't know what--"Mother" didn't seem right--what is this? And I made a private retreat with a Jesuit in St. Louis when I was in St. Louis, so that's moving me along a ways. And it was during that retreat that I came to the realization that okay, I didn't have a father to relate to, but my faith tells me I do have a Father. And I started saying the "Our Father" thinking of God--Our Father God. And I have to say that helped me a great deal. And then going for regular spiritual direction--I did that in St. Louis, and I continued it here. And I found in my earlier days that my attitude toward retreat was [sighs], "Oh retreat time's coming. I have to find out where to go." And it isn't that way anymore. It's "When is retreat time coming? When can we get away for retreat?" It's just a whole different ball game. And I found that with the idea--again, I've been fortunate--I've lived in local communities that placed a value on daily local community prayer together. Um--I forgot what I was going to say--it couldn't have been that important. It went out the window. It had something to do with prayer. Oh I know. I--once I left the Mount, I was never in a local community that used the breviary. And I was forever grateful. That never meant anything to me. I love the Psalms. But just mumbling all of those words--. And so the way I pray now is--the sacred time for me, and the best, is after I wake up in the morning. And that period of time I give to God each morning. And it's really reading the daily readings, thinking about what messages are in them for me today, and then a period of just quiet--trying not to have anything going through [gestures across forehead]. And that's not always easy, but that's my attempt. And as I said I do go for regular spiritual direction and that's been very helpful. Someone that you can journey with that you trust. You're not looking for answers--you're sharing your journey, and getting some feedback. Not answers, feedback. "Well how come you've been saying that for the last ten times?" [laughs].

[01:13:28.26] INTERVIEWER: Can we think back to the Mount for just a moment? And first of all, I see on this--that you--what you prepared for Sister Darlene--could you talk about the assassination of John F. Kennedy--the assassination of JFK? Could you just tell that story?

[01:13:49.11] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I was living in the Home Management department with four students at that time. And on the budget they had--well, on the budget I had for the apartment we had no money for a television, so we had none. And in their budget they had no money for a television either. But they were all dating fellas largely from Loyola. So what they did was they told the fellas they would iron their--wash and iron their shirts--[laughs]--for a fee. And the fee was rental for the television during the time that we needed it to watch the--well the whole pageantry of JFK's funeral and the Texas scene and all of that. And that showed me very graphically the ingenuity of those women, and how JFK meant to them as young women, that they would do that. And they did that for other things after that too. And the boys were very good about bringing their shirts. [laughs]. I don't know how good the girls were at ironing them, but that wasn't the important thing. So that was a highlight for me. And when the rental fee was over, they took it back very responsibly. And there was no moaning around about not having a TV again. But it was--that's why I said they were fun to be with--they managed well--they were resourceful--and politically I loved them.

[01:16:04.23] INTERVIEWER: What do you mean by that--politically?

[01:16:08.04] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well the fact that that meant so much to them. And I

wasn't part of all of that decision-making. They came up with that with themselves and presented it. I don't know if they were Republicans or Democrats. But it was that JFK meant--and the country meant--that much to them. Of course the Mount was involved at that time too in the--what did they call that--we were Yemen one year--

[01:16:50.24] INTERVIEWER: The Model U.N.?

[01:16:53.28] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Model U.N. So I think that some of that probably rubbed off too. But--and it was one of those students at that time, Mike, that I'm a friend of to this day.

[01:17:09.17] INTERVIEWER: Speaking about our Mount students today, is there anything of the mission or charism that you hope is imparted to them for the future?

[01:17:22.05] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, my hope would be that they would be professional women with values oriented in the direction that their education suggested--regardless of religion. [laughs]. And that they support the college--the University--it's hard for me--the University. I think our charism comes through. And you hear that among people who rub shoulders and elbows with us. Words that you hear are "understanding", "kind", "thoughtful", "fun"--I think those all speak of the charism. And do think we are very fortunate in having the president we have currently. The president who immediately preceded her paved the way. And I couldn't say enough about Anne McElaney[-Johnson]. The very fact that you're sitting in that chair speaks of her understanding and need for the charism of love and reconciliation in this--in the world we live in. And certainly during this political scene, one could not think of anything that's needed more than the charism that we have.

[01:20:05.15] INTERVIEWER: I agree. Is there anything that you're most proud of over your professional religious career and ministry? A way you feel you've contributed?

[01:20:22.23] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well despite the demise of Home Economics as Home Economics, I feel that I have over the years contributed a great deal to that area of education--especially in the areas of Child Development and Family Relationships. And I'm very proud of the ten years I spent at Inter-community Consultants. I don't know--as I look back over my life, I feel like I've received infinitely more than anything I've given. And I hope I've--in this brief interview I hope I've indicated that in some way. I just--I have been so blessed, and so fortunate in what I have been assigned to do, and what I have volunteered to do, and what I have done. [laughs]. One experience with a so-called celebrity that I had that I look back on every once in a while. I mean, you all are much too young to remember him I think--Alvin Toffler [(1928-2016)]. He wrote one of the first books on the future, called "Future Shock" that really hit the nation by storm. And at that time that book came out I was the President of the Missouri Home Economics Association. And as president I was heavily involved in planning the annual convention, which was at the University of Missouri that year. And I presented to the committee the idea of asking Alvin Toffler to come and speak to the convention as our keynote. I said, "I have no idea what he's going to charge. I don't know if he's available. But I think it would be wonderful if our Association could have him." Well, I did get in touch with him. He did agree. I don't remember what we paid him. But I got to introduce him. And I was very much involved--we had something called the Future Secretariat at that time, and every province had a group of that and then we had one in which various members of the congregation came together, and I was a member of that. So it had a particular significance to me. And I was a member of the World Future Society--you know, that kind of thing. So it became sort of a highlight. I don't know that I'm especially proud of it. But it was a highlight. Probably my first and only experience with what I might call "a celebrity". [laughs].

[01:24:47.03] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments].

[01:24:54.04] INTERVIEWER: Was there anything else you reflected on that we haven't talked about that you'd like to share?

[01:24:58.17] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: I didn't even look at my own notes. [laughs].

[01:25:01.16] KELBY THWAITS: Did you want to take a minute to look at anything?

[01:25:03.29] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: No.

[01:25:05.08] INTERVIEWER: Or is there--one of the questions we've been asking--is there a memory of a Sister who's passed away that you want to make sure we remember? You've mentioned a number of your Sisters.

[01:25:17.14] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: No. But one thing I do remember. I don't know what triggered it. It was in my own notes--I don't think you have this--about how I felt when people started leaving and the future. I am not concerned about our future. I am thoroughly and totally convinced that that period of time in the late fifties into the mid-seventies was an anomaly. That those large numbers came and we will never, ever, ever again have those kind of numbers. And when you look back at our history, we started with the so-called "mustard seed". And so we will very likely go out as a mustard seed. But look what the mustard seed can do. So I have no regrets about the movement out that occurred. Yes, those were some wonderful women, and they're making their way in society now. Many of them are still in touch with us, so--. I think what will be will be, and as my mom often said, "che sarà, sarà". I have no negative feelings about the future. We will do what God wants us to do.

[01:27:20.23] INTERVIEWER: Amen.

[01:27:24.03] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Amen.

[01:27:26.06] INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much.

[01:27:28.02] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Thank you. And thank you both.

[01:27:31.17] [Director's comments].

[01:28:36.21] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Well, that group [Inter-community Consultants]--I spent almost two months in South Africa as a result of that group. Because the King Dominicans had moved their novitiate from Germany to Johannesburg. And they were gathering--and they were an international community. And they were gathering all of their leadership groups together in Johannesburg. And we were hired to facilitate that group. So that was another wonderful experience. I was there at the time just before [Nelson] Mandela [(1918-2013), former president of South Africa] was released [from prison]. And I arrived the night of a--in Capetown--at a time when they were--they were just coming from a big rally. And of course the Dominican Sisters were still in habits. And they came in--they were all purple--because the opposition had these great big canisters of water, and they had died them purple--the water purple. And so the Sisters came in just [gestures down front of body]--it was just awful. But then I got to go to Tutu's [Desmond Tutu (1931-), Anglican Bishop and South African social rights activist] church, and--it was just--I would never have had those kind of experiences without Inter-community Consultants.

[01:30:17.04] INTERVIEWER: I've heard people say, join religious life, see the world.

[01:30:20.06] SISTER CECILE THERESE BERESFORD: Yeah. Sometimes that's true.

[01:30:25.24] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments].

[01:30:38.10] End of interview.

Interview Date: 10/26/2016

Interviewee: Sister Cecile Therese Beresford

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Laura Townsend, Production Coordinator, CSJ Institute.

Location: Carondelet Center

Transcription Date: 01/04/2017

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:26.04] Full name and age: Sister Cecile Therese Beresford, aka "Ceese", 90 years old.

[00:01:13.21] Early life and family. Born Hastings, Nebraska. Moved Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri. Single mom. Elementary boarding school Evansville, Wisconsin. Evansville Public high school. Moved Dubuque, Iowa. Singing lessons. One year at Visitation Sisters Academy--Sister Patricia [??] vocal teacher. Moved to Fresno, California 1941. St. Theresa's school in Fresno with CSJs.

[00:04:44.18] Growing up with single mother and moving around. Baptismal name [Joanne]. No bad "single parent family" experience.

[00:05:55.04] Family religious life. "Unchurched". No Catholic training until Visitation Academy. Sister Laurentia [Sr. Mary Laurentia Digges?? (1910-1991)], English faculty at St. Theresa's, Fresno. Taking Catholic instruction to be Sister. Attended Mount for one year.

[00:07:58.12] Influence of Sister Laurentia. Mother's reaction to entering religious life. Hopes for religious life. Story of friendship with Sr. Laurentia.

[00:09:59.04] Early novitiate days. Unfamiliar with religious practices. "Going through motions." Attending Mount during novitiate, received BA in English? and History minor. Attending UCLA studying Home Economics education and administration. Instructor at UCLA hired her for research project on rice.

[00:14:00.12] First ministry: St. Brigid's, Pacific Beach near San Diego teaching first through third grades. Lived with Sister Mary Helen Pettid [(1901-1993)], Sister Rose Cecilia Harrington [(1919-2003)], Sister Bernard Joseph [??]. Later lived with Rose Cecilia.

[00:15:25.07] Mission to Cathedral Girls High School, San Diego. Mission at St. Mary's Academy, Los Angeles teaching World History and Religion two years.

[00:16:41.08] Mother Josephine [Sister Mary Josephine Feeley (1905-1991)??], provincial asking her to go to UCLA for Home Economics. Replacing Sister Marguerite Ellard, as chair of Home Economics department at MSMU. Importance of Home Economics for "Land Grant colleges" and high schools. Issues when developing curriculum. Team teaching across departments. Liberal arts curriculum.

[00:20:43.05] Teaching at college level. Students living in "Home Management Apartments" as part of curriculum. Friend student Michelle "Mike" Larkin.

[00:23:30.15] Needs of students in 1950s and 1960s. Dating and marriage planning.

[00:25:14.16] Melding professional departments other than nursing with liberal arts. Faculty exchange program. Developing Home Economics department at Fontbonne College with emphasis in Nutrition, Dietetics and Home Economics Education. Becoming President of Missouri Home Economics Association and later board member. Traveling to conventions. Developing student arm of Home Economics Assn. Companion [Mary Carol], dietitian.

[00:29:35.06] Integration issues in 1960s. Fontbonne and Washington University "nastiness"--fires on campus, etc. Acting as Director of Residence at Fontbonne. Introduction of African-American students. Students "taking over" Residence Hall. Vatican II--College Church run by Jesuits--new liturgical songs due to Vatican II changes.

[00:33:29.09] Living with St. Louis Province Sisters. Other Vatican II changes. Creating new community at Fontbonne. Gaining neighborhood approval to move community to new house formerly owned by prostitutes.

[00:36:42.02] Changes from Vatican II. Changes to habit--sense of anonymity. Changes causing issues in larger groups but not community.

[00:39:11.10] Living in another province. Acting in general governance. General Superior Sister Mary Kevin Ford and Assistant Superior Sister Ida Robertine Berresheim [birth name Elizabeth Jean]. Having to change to St. Louis Province. "Discernment" as decision-making method. Sister Rose Cecilia Harrington also in general council. Renewing "Holy Rule"--constitution. Establishing Research and Development Office at generalate--two years.

[00:43:38.20] Presenting statistical information to Vatican. Local communities vs "unit"--Sisters living alone or group designated as unit. Sister Mary Kevin Ford and general council. Province vs congregation.

[00:47:28.00] [Director's comments].

[00:48:53.20] Experiences at generalate. Sister Mary Kevin's model of governance.

[00:49:51.24] Working with [Inter-Community Consultants]--multi-religious group interested in systemic change to help leadership groups work together and with members. Issues with training male religious communities--sexual harassment, deprecating training, drinking. "Clericalism".

[00:56:47.20] Religious life at varying levels--local to generalate. Challenges of living in retirement center. Communication between Sisters.

[01:00:06.08] Charism and history of CSJs. The "dear neighbor". Justice issues. Calls to Action--"seeing with new eyes". Example of changing way of brushing teeth to save water. Example of water glasses at table. Difference between "Wanting" and "needing".

[01:08:13.08] Spiritual life--retreats and prayer. Thinking of God as Father as a fatherless child. Looking forward to retreats. Giving morning time to God. Spiritual direction--sharing your journey.

[01:13:27.11] Assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy while at Mount. Students trading washing and ironing of shirts in exchange for money to rent TV to use to watch funeral of JFK. Student interest in politics. Model U.N.

[01:17:09.25] Imparting mission and charism to current Mount students. Mount president Anne McElaney-Johnson. Current need for love and reconciliation.

[01:20:09.11] Proud moments in career. Contributions to Home Economics education. Inter-community Consultants. Alvin Toffler [(1928-2016)], author of "Future Shock" as keynote speaker for Home Economics Association.

[01:24:51.00] Other reflections. Hope for future of CSJs. Small group of Sisters as "the mustard seed".

[01:27:27.07] [Director's comments].

[01:28:36.17] Visiting South Africa for Inter-community Consultants just before Nelson Mandela [(1918-2013)] released from prison. Dominican Sisters being sprayed with purple dye by opposition.

[01:30:38.06] End of interview.